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BEWILDERMENT IN EDUCATION

By

ALOYSIUS J. HOGAN, S.J., PH.D.



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Box 434

Presidential Address

FORDHAM UNIVERSITY
CONVOCATION OF ALL FACULTIES

MAY 12, 1935

BEWILDERMENT IN EDUCATION

by

THE VERY REVEREND
ALOYSIUS J. HOGAN, S.J., Ph.D. (Cantab)
PRESIDENT OF FORDHAM UNIVERSITY

*"Ego sum Via, et Veritas, et Vita:
nemo venit ad Patrem, nisi per Me."*

—John xiv, 6.

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FORDHAM UNIVERSITY
EDUCATIONAL BULLETINS

June, 1935

BEWILDERMENT IN EDUCATION

THIS delightful occasion of our Annual Convocation affords a most pleasant and much-desired opportunity for me to express, in the name of the University, our heartfelt gratitude and appreciation to each one of you, devoted members of the Secular Clergy and Laity, for your loyal assistance and whole-hearted co-operation during the year now drawing to a close.

Almighty God in His beneficent goodness has bestowed abundant blessings on all our activities, despite economic stress and financial stringency and the difficulties consequent thereto. That He may continue thus to bless our work in His Cause, and to bless each one of you, is our fervent prayer each day at His altar.

The characteristic note of the modern mind is bewilderment. This bewilderment is the product of pride and ignorance, both unified by a blind acceptance of authority. It is a bewilderment which is fostered and propagated by fashion, print and iteration; and these three are the chains which enslave it to a so-called authority, not based on reason. It is difficult to come to grips with the modern mind because it is as nebulous and shifting as smoke or cloud. The attempt to meet the modern mind is what Socrates of old called *σκιμαχῆν*, to box with shadows. The concrete effects, however, of modern mental bewilderment are everywhere discernible, in the individual, in the economic and social orders, as well as in the political and international ones.

There is the bewilderment of the individual as to the meaning and purpose of his own nature. It has been iterated and reiterated an infinite number of times that the individual man is a mechanical machine, matter modified by motion, a higher

upward thrust of material organization, a mere assemblage of conflicting interests. Or even if it be admitted that life is something different from matter, the individual man by the evolution of species is said to be only a more complex and perfect organism than the simple vital forms from which he is descended.

It has been repeated for ever so many times that man as an individual is sacred, endowed with liberty (though in another breath the freedom of the will is denied), free to pursue his own interests and to give full expression to the forces, particularly the lower forces, within him. It has been told the individual by innumerable authorities that he is a mere creature of time, that there is nothing substantial back of his ideas and impressions, that God and a future life are unknown, unknowable and unintelligible, that these are mere fanciful and poetic productions. Hence the conclusion is drawn with wearisome monotony that man is subject to no law either of logic or of physical restraint, save a law democratically imposed upon himself as an individual, or imposed by the collectivity on individuals democratically organized.

In the economic order we see man's bewilderment intensified and working man's ruin. We listen to authority after authority implicitly asserting that the security of the masses is dependent upon the protection of property rights to the neglect and exclusion of human rights. We learn that prosperity is to rise from destruction, and security for the proletariat from taxes which are always passed on to the proletariat. In other words, we are told that, when at last we are able to produce enough goods to furnish all with a comfortable living, the comfortable living will come from the destruction of production either directly, or by excessive taxation indirectly, instead of by the simple expedient of producing to the limit of our capacity and distributing the goods thus produced by suitable wages, which are only goods in another form.

In the social order, the order of the family and state, the bewilderment of the modern mind reaches still greater heights. In marriage secondary purposes become primary and primary purposes become secondary or no purposes at all. In the civil

order, the state, which is for the family and for the individual by natural ordinance, for the safeguarding of peace and the promotion of prosperity, the state becomes a created deity, to direct, to regulate, to interfere and to coerce. Thus a sort of collective servitude either economic, coming from organized wealth, or political, coming from the state, is being pressed down upon individuals who, according to previous authoritarian statements, were supposed to have at least a modicum of freedom.

And when we come to the international order the bewilderment is supreme. Pride and ignorance in the various nationalities, bound together and propagated by a divorced-from-reason authoritarian principle, whether communistic or fascist, threaten not only the peace and prosperity of the world but the very existence of civilization itself.

All these are the roots and the fruits of the bewilderment of the modern mind. What is the remedy? Intellectual honesty, unrelenting sincerity. The honesty to admit that the world has been operating on false principles with regard to the individual, with regard to economic and wealth-getting factors, with regard to the family and the state and the concert of nations.

The concrete principles for these orders are commonplaces with you. Man is not merely a mechanical or chemical organism. Man is more than a glorified animal. Man is both matter and spirit, and as matter and spirit he is the connecting link between the material universe and God. The whole universe, matter, man and God, are bound together by a harmonious relationship of subordination, which is the logical result of the nature of creatures and the nature of God. Destroy this harmony, destroy the right order of relationship of the material universe to man, and of man to the material universe, destroy the relationship of man to God, and the relationship of the material universe to God through man, and by every principle, logical and psychological, you are bound to arrive at the bewilderment of the human mind and the chaos resulting from it, the evidence for which is piled up high round about us.

This Convocation of all the Faculties of our great University bears eloquent testimony that the bewilderment of the

modern mind with regard to questions fundamental to human life and human happiness has found no entrance here. Here research, experimentation, discussion, flourish unhampered by those materialistic prepossessions upon which they have been wrecked in universities less fortunate, at least in the ability to apply their fruits for the promotion of a fuller life and a fuller happiness.

It is the unreasonable and authoritarian rejection of absolutes and ultimates which has finally defeated the well-meant and zealous research of other universities. Only the truth and the whole truth will make men free. It is necessary to see life clearly and to see it as a whole. Starting from the truth of fundamental principles, both philosophical and revealed, and with the certainty that truth cannot contradict truth, our researches, our studies, our investigations, our teaching have not been influenced by the assumptions which have produced modern mental bewilderment.

Here the conclusions of chemistry, physics, biology, what we may call the human sciences, economics, sociology and political science, are not in conflict with fundamental, assured, absolute and ultimate truths about the material universe, about man and about God. Here all the sound conclusions of natural science meet their higher interpretation for human life and human happiness in an integral philosophy of life and in the Catholic Religion which is the crown of that philosophy.

Hence, here in Fordham University the various Faculties of Religion, Philosophy, Science, Literature, Art, though unrestricted in their proper lines of activity, are, nevertheless, brought to a higher synthesis and a complete interpretation in truth looked at as a whole. Here at Fordham we do not and cannot accept secondary truths and secondary solutions as primary and final ones. Here we do not and logically cannot admit that truth can contradict truth. Here we do not and cannot concede that the ultimate conclusions of one faculty can be in fundamental contradiction with the ultimate conclusions of another.

Here we deny, and logically, that there is or can be any real

conflict between science and Religion. We go further than that. We assert that unless science, the arts, literature, political economy, sociology and political philosophy are humanized by subordination to higher truths, namely, ultimates and absolutes, which have to do with the material universe, with man and with God, they are nullifying themselves by nullifying human nature in their denial of man's true position in the harmony of the universe. For these sciences and arts are the servants of man, not his masters.

We go still further than this. We assert that a great deal of the modern bewilderment is the product of the modern bewildered university. We say that first of all this bewilderment is the product of pride which theoretically or practically excludes God from university life, and hence, in a prideful exaltation of man by divorcing him from God, has only succeeded in bestializing him as something solely of time and earth. We say that this bewilderment is also sired by ignorance which, in its hatred of absolutes and ultimates, ignores, condemns and anathematizes that Scholastic Philosophy which has had so much to say through one thousand years on the nature of man and on the nature of the material universe and on the nature of God.

We go yet further and say that this bewilderment has grown by the acceptance of a false authority divorced from reason, nowhere better illustrated than in the dogmatic assertion and acceptance of a false evolutionary theory applied to almost every science.

May I sum up these remarks by a few sentences taken from an analysis of the modern mind by Hilaire Belloc: "The Modern Mind is confirmed in its folly by the fixed idea that someone or other somewhere 'proved' its errors to be truths and that the proof was final and obvious. * * * To all this the Modern Mind has added an ethic of whose origin it never heard, but which has for its author Comté. It is the worship of Humanity, and of Humanity mortal. That is good which makes men happier here—or looks as though it might; and happier, not mainly through the satisfaction of justice nor even by a search for beauty, but in seeking things much more tangible

and perishable; mainly the body. And this worship of ourselves in the place of God is heavily reinforced by Nationalism on the one hand, and by the Communist cry for economic equality on the other."

In the face of all this it would seem unduly optimistic to hope that the modern mind will return to intellectual honesty and unrelenting sincerity. However, there are encouraging signs on the horizon. Many of these are contained in an illuminating book, *The Limitations of Science*, by J. W. N. Sullivan. Those tempted to despair will be encouraged by many of his remarks and particularly with this paragraph with which I would close: "Science has become self-conscious and comparatively humble. We are no longer taught that the scientific method of approach is the only valid method of acquiring knowledge about reality. Eminent men of science are insisting, with what seems a strange enthusiasm, on the fact that science gives us but a partial knowledge of reality, and we are no longer required to regard as illusory everything that science finds itself able to ignore. * * * We need not be surprised, therefore, to find that the discovery that science no longer compels us to believe in our own essential futility is greeted with acclamation, even by some scientific men."

"The fact that science is confined to a knowledge of structure is obviously of great 'humanistic' importance. For it means that the problem of the nature of reality is not prejudged. We are no longer required to believe that our response to beauty, or the mystic's sense of communion with God, have no objective counterpart. It is perfectly possible that they are, what they have so often been taken to be, clues to the nature of reality. Thus our various experiences are put on a more equal footing, as it were. Our religious aspirations, our perceptions of beauty, may not be the essentially illusory phenomena they were supposed to be. In this new scientific universe even mystics have a right to exist."

The modern mind must return to intellectual honesty, to unrelenting sincerity, else all our seeming progress is but an illusion. Here is our privilege, our responsibility, our sacred

duty, Faculty Members of Fordham University! Heirs to an integral philosophy of life which is elevated by the integralism of the Catholic Religion, we can be real leaders in every phase of America's educational life by manifesting in public effort and in private endeavor that intellectual honesty which is unrelenting sincerity.



L. D. S.

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